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**MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

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**TITLE: COUNTERNARCOTICS STRATEGIES: EFFECTS ON AFGHANISTAN  
HEARTS AND MINDS**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Counternarcotics Strategies: Effects on Afghanistan Hearts and Minds

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**Thesis:** Because Afghanistan poppy cultivation, and its opium trade are deeply imbedded in the country's social and economic landscape, which impacts human security and the population's trust in its government, finding the optimal counternarcotics solution entails a profound understanding of a complex range of social and economic factors.

**Discussion:** During his December 1, 2009 address at West Point, New York, President Barack Obama delivered his intent to send 30,000 more service members to Afghanistan with the caveat of a phased withdrawal beginning mid 2011. The President's deadline makes it critical for policy and operational leaders among the national instruments of power to work cohesively and comprehensively to stabilize Afghanistan. The contest in Afghanistan is a battle against an insurgency in which success depends on the ability of a centralized national government to win the hearts and minds of its people. The United States government and many regional experts have identified opium trade in Afghanistan as a major source of insurgency funding to fuel its operations. Consequently, a counternarcotics strategy becomes an important tool to realize the objective of stabilizing Afghanistan.

**Conclusion:** The counternarcotics strategy is an intrinsically linked component of the coalition's counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan. The strategy must not undermine the effort. Pakistan is a key player in the successful reduction of illicit opium trade. Equally, social and economic programs such as alternative livelihood development must be sustained in conjunction with the impartial and equitable enforcement of enacted judicial reforms. The Afghanistan government must vigorously cleanse itself from the scourge of corruption; shoulder the burden of providing human security against radicalized theology, organized crime, and nefarious non-state actors while remaining committed to providing services for its citizens. Finally, regardless of U.S. government involvement in fighting the insurgency, its counternarcotics efforts in the region will extend well into the foreseeable future

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## **Counternarcotics Strategies: Effects on Afghanistan Hearts and Minds**

### **Introduction**

President Barack Obama delivered his intent to send 30,000 more service members to Afghanistan to the American people on December 1, 2009. During his address at West Point, President Obama provided a deadline for a phased withdrawal during the middle of 2011.<sup>1</sup> The President's deadline makes it critical for policy and operational leaders among the national instruments of power to work cohesively and comprehensively to stabilize Afghanistan. The contest in Afghanistan is a battle against an insurgency in which success depends on the ability of a centralized national government to win the hearts and minds of its people. The United States (U.S.) administration identified opium trade in Afghanistan as a major source of insurgency funding to purchase weapons and materials to fight International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) forces.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, a counternarcotics strategy becomes an important tool to realize the objective of stabilizing Afghanistan. Because Afghanistan poppy cultivation and its opium trade are deeply imbedded in the country's social and economic landscape, which impact human security and the population's trust in its government, finding the optimal solution entails a profound understanding of a complex range of social and economic factors.

### **Geostrategic Factors**

Before examining the counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan, one must understand the geostrategic factors of the region and how internal and external actors are linked to the narcotic economy and the insurgency in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is the crossroads linking Central Asian Republics with the Middle East and South Asia. Iran is located along Afghanistan's western border, the Central Asian Republics are located along its northern border, and Pakistan is its

eastern neighbor. The Hindu Kush Mountains bisect Afghanistan with narrow valleys and treacherous passes. The terrain is difficult to traverse and is frequently limited to rudimentary road connectivity.<sup>3</sup> For the Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan and Iran lay between them and the Arabian Sea. While access is direct from Iran, Afghanistan is a land locked nation and requires the permission of Iran or Pakistan for access to the Arabian Sea. The country is composed of a mixture of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other smaller ethnic groups who rarely have unity among themselves. Tribal affiliations are generally more important than senses of nationalism or national identity that Americans value. Old tribal customs include tribal specific interpretations of and understandings of Islam that may not account for or address the modern world, what little its remoteness may realize. The only period of peaceful centralized rule during its long history was during the rule of King Zahir Shah when warlords who controlled different regions of Afghanistan accepted his rule in return for autonomy within their local empires.

The key to many Afghanistan problems is Pakistan. Pakistan suffers from its own identity crisis since and because of the nature of its inception.<sup>4</sup> Its strategists worry about Pakistan's lack of strategic depth because of India.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Pakistan believes that Afghanistan is its only available strategic option against India.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet-Afghanistan war led to active efforts among the U.S., Pakistan, and the Taliban to combat the Soviet communist client regime. However, after the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan during 1989, the U.S. abandoned its anti-communist allies and created a power vacuum.<sup>7</sup> The power vacuum fueled a civil war, which the Taliban, with Pakistani support eventually gained a majority control of Afghanistan. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the U.S., Pakistan President Musharraf summed up Pakistan policy very succinctly, "First say yes (to American demands) and later say but [...]."<sup>8</sup> U.S. strategies of using small forces to target the Taliban but ignore warlords who controlled



different regions of Afghanistan was faulty because many warlords' empires were fueled by foreign funding, and the opium trade, which was left untouched.<sup>9</sup> Warlords have private armies and choose sides depending on who paid better.

According to Rashid, the U.S. strategy centered on rooting out the Taliban, and ignored nation building.<sup>10</sup> Instead the task of reconstructing Afghanistan was turned over to non-government organizations (NGO), which resulted in poor coordination, corruption, and wasting billions of dollars.<sup>11</sup> Denying Al Qaeda and the Taliban freedom to operate in Afghanistan is difficult because insurgents have significant force and influence in Pakistan's "North West Frontier Province (NWFP)" and the "Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)."<sup>12</sup> The Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) has secured midlevel Taliban leaders in Karachi, making their neutralization nearly impossible.<sup>13</sup> Opium production surged to 8,200 tons per year in 2007 (up from 6,100 tons in 2006) and was the main source of funds for fueling Taliban operations.<sup>14</sup> Eliminating opium production will not be an easy task. It will require a quantum understanding of the social dynamics of poppy cultivation and the economic effects on the greater Afghanistan and Pakistan communities as well as local agricultural communities and villages to arrive at an optimal counternarcotics strategy.

### **Socio-Economic Factors**

Afghanistan's population is 28 million and consists of 42% Pashtuns, 27% Tajiks, "9% Hazara, 9% Uzbeks, 4% Aimak, 3% Turkmen, 2% Baloch," and 4% other ethnic tribes; 80% of whom are Sunni Muslims and 19% are Shia Muslims.<sup>15</sup> Pashtuns occupy most of the west, south and parts of central and eastern Afghanistan, while Tajiks and Uzbeks are more predominant in the north and western parts of the country.<sup>16</sup> Pashtuns and Baloch also live in Pakistan's

northwestern, western and Baluchistan provinces where they share family and tribal relationships (See Figure 1). While Islam is the common religion for all ethnic tribes, each has its own set of tribal customs and traditions. The structure is feudal and nearly uniform with similar administrative processes. Warlords or tribal chieftains levy taxes on other tribes traveling across their territories, and land owners charge their tenants for farming their land. Government authorities often pay to gain and maintain the allegiance of warlords or tribal leaders. Elevated terrain areas subsist on pastoral tribal economies while plain areas have feudal agricultural economies. Traditionally, a gathering of tribal elders and chieftains called a Loya Jirga is held to settle disputes or problems.<sup>17</sup>

Afghanistan's diverse geography with the Hindu Kush Mountains ranging through the middle of the country, wheat plains in the north, and desert terrain in the south make food distribution inequitable and problematic. However, Afghanistan improved its agricultural practices in some areas by introducing the use of mechanized farming and was more than self-sufficient in producing food before the Soviet Union's invasion in 1979.<sup>18</sup> In Afghanistan's feudal social structure, land owners allow farmers and sharecroppers to farm and work the land in return for a percentage of the produce. This system worked reasonably well until the Soviets interfered and instituted its own communist agricultural policies. The Soviet invasion in 1979 also brought Cold War martial dynamics to Afghanistan. The never-ending insurgency against the Soviet Union was supported by the U.S. and consequently there was no method for the government or the feudal agricultural system to support farmers. With no other means to make farming economical, farmers began increasingly to cultivate poppy that promised greater profits. Licit agriculture such as orchards, require care, tending and time. The Soviet-Afghan war created a chaotic, unpredictable environment and was not conducive to farming. Poppy cultivation on the

other hand, was a viable alternative because it grows easily and can survive under war time conditions. Cold War calculations removed any qualms of allowing drugs as an instrument of state policy as the “CIA and its allies, in order to help finance the proxy U.S.-Soviet war, tolerated the rise of the biggest drug empires in Afghanistan.”<sup>19</sup> The collapse of the agricultural system and the severe droughts during 2000 and 2001 left thousands of Afghans without jobs, desperate and no means of subsistence. Many unemployed Afghans joined the Taliban, while others grew poppy at the behest of the Taliban. Even if warlords were against the Taliban, simple economics left them no options except to engage in poppy cultivation and the opium trade to pay for their private armies and maintain control over their feudal empires. The opium trade not only funds warlords, it funds the Taliban and the Pakistan ISI, which uses the money for its own strategic needs.<sup>20</sup> The opium trade feeds not only western society, but also feeds the demand of Pakistani addicts who use heroin from poppy grown in Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup>

Opium production is Afghanistan’s largest business within the country, accounting for more than 92% of the world’s opium production representing one half of Afghanistan’s GDP.<sup>22</sup> “90% of the Afghan opium is produced in the southern provinces where the Taliban insurgency is at its fiercest.”<sup>23</sup> Opium in its natural form is not potent, and requires chemicals to transform the poppy plants into heroin. Previously, raw opium was transported out of Afghanistan to production facilities elsewhere in the world before it was processed into heroin. However, since 2003, there has been an increasing trend in the seizure of chemicals used for heroin production. Now, 70% of the opium is processed into heroin in Afghanistan, evidencing a growing sophistication and capability of its narcotics industry.<sup>24</sup>

Trade in narcotics not only fuels the Taliban insurgency, but it also provides capital for legitimate businesses that the government cannot provide. Money from the opium trade helps

the building sector and the sheer volume of money transactions (\$3 billion per annum) has made opium commodities a secondary banking industry in Afghanistan.<sup>25</sup> Three million Afghans (15% of the population) depend directly on poppy cultivation in one form or another with millions more being indirectly dependant on the opium trade. Even districts that exercised concerted efforts to become 'poppy free' are not immune to the possibility of reverting back to poppy cultivation.

During 2007, the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) reported that over 13 provinces were poppy free that rose to 18 in 2008 and possibly 22 provinces by January 2009.<sup>26</sup> Despite the optimism that these statistics portend, understanding the contributing economic factors should serve as an exercise in caution when considering counternarcotics strategies. The experiences of Nangarhar and Ghor provinces during 2007 and 2008 are revealing. Local Afghanistan authorities in both these provinces used coercion and inducement to force farmers to abandon poppy cultivation in favor of wheat farming and planting cash crops such as onions. Specifically, provincial governments used the promise of coalition forces presence to induce farmers to abandon poppy cultivation. Additionally, in irrigated portions of the provinces permitting greater crop diversification, the cost of living increased negating the profitability of wheat farming while the price of onion cash crops fell. In the Ghor province, land fertility was not suitable for poppy cultivation so farmers understandably abandoned the proposition. However, a critical problem in the provincial government's program of coercion and inducement was failing to provide agricultural options and plan for a sustenance policy in the event of crop failures.

During 2007 and 2008, when the prices of onions fell, farmers who had scarce access to water and therefore no options for diversifying their crops were forced to continue producing onions,

further reducing their incomes.<sup>27</sup> In the same period, lower rainfall also contributed to lower yields.<sup>28</sup> Harsh winters also forced farmers to sell or consume precious livestock, adding to increased hardship to farmers.<sup>29</sup> The direct result of these events was that farmers had less income to sustain themselves, as opposed to incomes farmers would have otherwise earned through poppy cultivation. Additionally, lawlessness and banditry increased in the two regions studied.<sup>30</sup> Lack of government development assistance, support or jobs meant that the people of the two provinces lost confidence in the government's ability to provide them a livelihood leading to rising sentiment, which left farmers with little choice except poppy cultivation.<sup>31</sup> "Increases in household debt due to weather, eradication, and changing prices have compelled farmers in various regions to mortgage land or expand poppy cultivation as an economic coping strategy."<sup>32</sup>

A Congressional Research Service (CRS) report stated that 16 of 34 provinces in Afghanistan were growing poppy in 2007-2008.<sup>33</sup> Poppy cultivation started growing in 1981 and continued to grow during the Soviet occupation, when the Taliban was fighting its insurgency war against the Soviet Union. After the Soviet-Afghan war and the subsequent civil war, production dropped dramatically in 2001. As the victors, the Taliban banned opium production but permitted opium trafficking. Opium production continued in areas controlled by the Northern Alliance to fund their war effort. Thereafter, opium production rose to an all time high of 8,200 metric tons in 2007.<sup>34</sup> Helmand province had the highest growth of poppy cultivation, where complex tribal rivalries compelled U.S. Army forces to employ anthropologists to understand how to deal with the numerous tribes.<sup>35</sup>

The nexuses among drug warlords and members of the Afghanistan government themselves are deep. Reportedly, "[...] a quarter of the 249 members of the Afghan Parliament have

connections with the drug trade” that amounts to 70% of all opium smuggling.<sup>36</sup> Provincial and local governments and warlords notionally support various eradication programs. In fact, government officials accept money to inflate poppy eradication statistics while claiming compensation on behalf of farmers. Poppy cultivation actually diminished in Afghanistan during the Taliban reign due to its ideological and religious opposition to drugs. Now, the Taliban tacitly accept poppy cultivation because it can benefit from the illicit revenue generated by the opium trade industry to fund insurgent activity. For other groups and warlords, poppy cultivation has become an intrinsic part of the Afghanistan economy and a way of life and means for bankrolling their empires. Despite the high levels of exploitation where poppy farmers receive as little as 20% of the value of the crops grown, supply, demand and prices dictate the value of and benefit of poppy as greater than other agricultural options.<sup>37</sup> Because there is an inadequate, unbalanced or no comprehensive government strategy providing developmental assistance or subsidized alternative crop options to balance the potential profit from poppy, farmers are reluctant to abandon its cultivation.

International cartels cannot allow the Afghanistan supply to dry up. The economics of global heroin sales are telling. During 2004, a kilogram of heroin grade 4 sold for \$4,000 in Afghanistan, while the same grades in Columbia cost \$10,149, and in the U.S. \$66,250.<sup>38</sup> As drug cartels increased their logistical capacity and efficiency, the price of heroin fell in the U.S. retail markets making it easier for greater numbers of drug users to support their addictions at lower prices made possible by relatively inexpensive Afghan heroin. In addition to lower prices, the purity of heroin increased from 11% in 1981 to 46% in 2003 allowing addicts to get more for their money.<sup>39</sup> Eradicating poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is not only in the U.S. best interests but also in the best interests of its European allies as 89% of the heroin supply to Europe also

comes from Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> The supply of opium travels through an expansive network of drug traffickers that depends on ethnic affinities for opium trade within Afghanistan and “relationships between ethnic Tajik, Uzbek, Pashtun, Baluchi Afghans and their counterparts in central Asia, Pakistan, and Iran,” to the international market.<sup>41</sup> The drug transit pattern out of Afghanistan flows to the east, north and west to Pakistan, Central Asian Republics, and Iran respectively. Even the Kabul International Airport is a major transit port for outgoing opium and heroin products. The Los Angeles Times reported that more than \$10 million is smuggled out of Kabul International Airport through active collusion among the drug cartels, airport officials and members of the government, and most of this money ends up in Taliban hands.<sup>42</sup>

### **Past Counternarcotics Strategies**

Article V of the Bonn Agreement 2001 establishing the Afghan Interim Authority declared that “the Interim Authority shall cooperate with the international community in the fight against terrorism, drugs, and organized crime.”<sup>43</sup> In response, Afghanistan President Karzai’s government declared a formal ban on poppy cultivation in 2002 with a wide range of strategies for poppy eradication including providing alternative livelihoods, training of forces and judicial reforms with active help from the U.S. Since 2001, the U.S. “Five Pillars,” counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan was based on public information, judicial reform, alternative livelihood development, interdiction and eradication.<sup>44</sup>

The information strategy was focused on raising public awareness about the ill effects of drugs. The services of community leaders and Islamist scholars were used to communicate the message. As part of this strategy, the Afghan Ulema council also issued a fatwa against poppy cultivation “[...] in August 2004 that declared poppy cultivation to be contrary to Islamic sharia

law.”<sup>45</sup> Local outreach groups were established to explain the ill effects of poppy cultivation in all provinces. The outreach program not only explained ill effects but also conveyed warnings of potential government actions against those caught indulging in poppy farming.

Judicial reforms included enactment of new counternarcotics laws by the Afghan government to deal with narcotics related offenses. These included better laws, legal procedures, and building of a legal infrastructure in Kabul.

Alternative livelihood programs had a two tiered approach. One tier included and ‘Immediate Needs,’ and ‘Cash for Work,’ programs to compensate laborers for working on agricultural projects such as building dams. The second tier provided ‘Comprehensive Development,’ for new infrastructure development, credit, and financial services.<sup>46</sup>

Since 2002, the interdiction strategy was led by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in *Operation Containment* in countries neighboring Afghanistan targeting drug traffickers and dismantling their networks.<sup>47</sup> *Operation Topaz* is another DEA initiative to interdict acetic anhydride, a chemical commonly used for heroin production in Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops were reluctant to engage in direct counternarcotics operations due to limited resources and fears of aggravating the increasingly complex opium situation. As late as 2006, General Jones stated, “Counternarcotics enforcement was not a military mission and having NATO troops out there burning crops was not going to significantly contribute to the war on drugs.”<sup>49</sup>

The eradication strategy was implemented via the Central Poppy Eradication Force, which would physically destroy poppy crops in targeted areas. The Bush Administration attempted to improve success rates by “[e]mbedding poppy elimination teams in selected provinces where agents would try to induce the families away from planting poppies.”<sup>50</sup> Though aerial spraying



was not used due to a lack of resources, ground based herbicidal treatments of poppy fields were used by counternarcotics forces beginning in 2006. "In March 2009, Obama Administration Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, called U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan the most wasteful and ineffective program."<sup>51</sup> Holbrooke's assessment mirrored the views of the Obama administration, which refocused the Afghanistan counternarcotics strategy as Blanchard suggested.<sup>52</sup>

### **Current Counternarcotics Strategies**

The current counternarcotics strategy builds on the "five pillars," strategy with a different emphasis. The Obama Administration believes that agriculture reforms and providing alternative livelihoods are top priorities.<sup>53</sup> The start point of any program begins with adequate funding. For the 2009 Fiscal Year (FY) supplemental and the proposed 2010 budget, the Obama Administration requested "\$84.8 million for the "new U.S. Embassy" in Kabul and "Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT)" for the U.S. Department of State plus another "\$137.6 million" for "interagency staffing."<sup>54</sup> Another "\$129 million" was requested to support counternarcotics and law enforcement efforts primarily "in the south and east of Afghanistan" and "\$214 million for "counternarcotics and stabilization programs."<sup>55</sup> "To date, .50-caliber machine guns and night vision equipment have been provided to Afghan counternarcotics forces by the U.S. Administration."<sup>56</sup>

Judicial reforms initiated by the Karzai government need support from the U.S. government and the same was provided by forming the Criminal Justice Task Force that advises the Afghan judicial system. The U.S. Department of Defense supported the creation of "a secure court facility" and "maximum security" prison in "Pol-e-Chakri" in Kabul.<sup>57</sup>

To break relationships between the narcotics trade and Afghanistan government officials, the U.S. government came down heavily on President Karzai's reluctance to tackle government corruption. "FY 2009 supplemental appropriation (P.L. 111-32) withholds 10% of about \$90 million in State Department counternarcotics funding subject to a certification that the Afghan government is acting against officials who are corrupt or committing gross human rights violations."<sup>58</sup> Removing ineffective and corrupt local governors is another key focus area in the war against drugs that has gathered increasing support. A good example was an appropriate decision by President Karzai to install Gulab Mangal as the governor of Helmand province, which has seen a 33% reduction in poppy cultivation in 2009 since he assumed his position.<sup>59</sup>

In order to ensure the counternarcotics strategy will work in Afghanistan, the U.S. administration has increased its pressure on the Pakistani establishment to stop distinguishing between a 'good terrorist' and a 'bad terrorist.' "Too many Pakistani soldiers and spooks still see India as the real enemy and the Taliban as a useful hedge against an India-leaning Afghanistan."<sup>60</sup> Because the narcotics trade is firmly embedded with the insurgency, President Obama urged Pakistan to reorient its fight against the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda.<sup>61</sup>

A counternarcotics strategy can be effective without losing the battle to win the hearts and minds of Afghanistan people, provided the government can effectively neutralize the dominance of the Taliban. The Afghanistan government must protect farmers, their families, and tribes from the Taliban and organized crime elements against reprisals in areas where crops have been eradicated. Should the Afghan government be unable or unwilling to provide the dynamics of human security sufficient to assure poppy growing communities, farmers will return to poppy cultivation to prevent retribution. The relationship between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency converge, and making a distinction between the two is difficult. U.S. forces

can mount more ground patrols and place early warning sensors to indicate the approach or proximity of hostile elements. Until Afghan forces are sufficient, U.S. forces can provide visible reassurance of protection without interfering with local activities. Critical to the success of the hearts and minds campaign is the “[a]ttempt to rebuild some of the tribal and other local structures, such as ‘*jirgas*’ and ‘*shuras*’ – traditional local councils- that were destroyed in the course of constant warfare over several decades.”<sup>62</sup> The Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) oversees this process, which is crucial as these “*jirgas*” and “*shuras*” would form the eyes and ears of the authority to tackle drug trade challenges as well as the insurgency. Under the IDLG mandate is the power to appoint police and remove corrupt officials.

The U.S. military and NATO’s reluctance has now given way to the realization that Afghan forces, and other U.S. and coalition drug enforcement authorities did not have the resources or wherewithal to combat the poppy problem on their own. Consequently, the NATO ISAF directives were changed in October 2008, “[...] to allow ISAF forces to take direct action against insurgency-linked narcotics targets if they so chose and if authorized by their own domestic laws.”<sup>63</sup> U.S. forces’ basic rules regarding counterterrorism have been modified to include counternarcotics operations as deemed fit though specific rules of engagement are not publically identified. However, under the declaration of Afghanistan as a combat zone, any operation, which could include counternarcotics operations that may involve force protection, is allowed. Interpretation of the Rules of Engagement (ROE) now allows targeting and elimination of drug traffickers on the battlefield.<sup>64</sup>

Coalition partners such as “Britain, have focused on interdicting traffickers and raiding drug labs.”<sup>65</sup> Freezing accounts linked to drug trafficking proceeds and compelling other nations to

cooperate and do the same to persons or organizations suspected of money laundering is an additional counternarcotics strategy implemented at national and international levels.

Authorities realized that spraying poppy crops with defoliants or slashing and burning poppy crops without providing alternative means of subsistence will only create more hardship and enemies. President Karzai, despite support he receives from the U.S., refused to allow aerial eradication spraying despite pressure from Washington.<sup>66</sup> In the Helmand province, strong-man Nad Ali turned against U.S. forces creating dangerous hostile conditions due to physical eradication of poppy crops.<sup>67</sup> U.S. and coalition forces must wisely consider the initial, second and third order consequences before committing to local eradication programs. For example, providing alternative means of employment is one of the most crucial parts of a counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan. This has become the focus of the Obama Administration's main strategy for countering the poppy economy. The employment schemes that provide cash to laborers who would have otherwise been poppy cultivators include road, dam, and bridge building programs. The program also includes establishing cottage industries; vocational training, and alternative crop production where resistant crop seeds are being provided to Afghan farmers as an economically viable alternative to the production of poppy. "Some countries are promoting alternative crops and are reporting good results by encouraging the growth of pomegranates and of saffron rice as alternative crops that draw buyers outside of Afghanistan."<sup>68</sup>

The present strength of counternarcotics assets and coalition forces in Afghanistan is insufficient and too small to be effective across the whole of Afghanistan. In addition to sending 30,000 more U.S. service members to Afghanistan, the U.S. administration is focusing on taking concrete steps to build the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (AFP). To ensure that past mistakes of ethnic favoritism are not repeated, the U.S. administration

advised the Afghan government to include people from all denominations in the ANA and the AFP. Building a common national mission among many ethnicities will help mitigate tribal mindsets of ethnic superiority that have historically degenerated into bloodshed. In addition to U.S. and NATO drug enforcement teams, the ANA and AFP are being trained in the art of counternarcotics operations. "The establishment of the Afghan Army's Counternarcotics Infantry Kandak in 2008 and the deployment of eradication teams to Helmand, Kandahar, and Uruzgan provinces in early 2009 indicate some steps have been taken to address these challenges."<sup>69</sup> The entire discussion of counternarcotics strategies is difficult to separate from counterinsurgency operations. However, the two are so inextricably linked that it is necessary to examine counternarcotics efforts as a component of the greater counterinsurgency efforts while understanding the second and third order effects on national and local economies and the society as a whole despite its fractured composition.

At broader policy levels, the current counternarcotics strategy could benefit from building and institutionalizing democratic structures at multiple levels in Afghanistan. Consequently the Obama Administration allocated \$881 million and \$801 million in FY2009 and FY2010 respectively for building democracy in Afghanistan.<sup>70</sup>

### **Counternarcotics Strategies Impacts**

Information campaigns launched by the Afghanistan and U.S. agencies to date have had a limited positive effect with only a few farmers abandoning poppy cultivation not because of 'ill effects,' but from fear of government action and losing more money due to crop eradication. Counternarcotics objectives of the government fell short because farmers frequently located their poppy crops to other locations where government action was not likely.<sup>71</sup> As the graph of

increasing opium production shows, such information programs or other measures taken have not discouraged poppy cultivation. (See Figure 2).

Though legal procedures and laws were revised, their implementation has been marginal and sketchy when applied to prosecuting government officials and important leaders suspected of involvement in drug trafficking. "Clearly, combating organized crime with political implications is a complicated matter."<sup>72</sup> Taking a too assertive approach might actually cause more chaos and instigate more hostilities eroding what peaceful gains coalition forces have achieved. "For example, the current governor of Nangarhar province, Gul Agha Sherzai," is credited with making his province 'poppy free,' was indicted on charges of narcotics trade with the Taliban while being governor of Kandahar province during 2002.<sup>73</sup> The reluctance to tackle powerful members of the government by President Karzai shows that a careful and more sophisticated approach must be taken rather than a rush to reward those with criminal histories in light of misunderstood statistical achievements.

Eradication programs where crops have been forcefully destroyed have led to resistance and violent clashes between farmers and the poppy eradication teams and did not result in much success. Many of the farmers take loans from their landlords to cultivate poppy. Destruction of their crop leaves them in debt and without subsistence. Poppy eradication programs without an alternative livelihood replacement or development assistance is a poor strategy. The lack of forethought results in unemployed and disenfranchised farmers with no better options than to join the Taliban out of resentment against the government, the need to eat or both.

Alternative livelihood programs have not been very successful because of local government corruption. Because of corruption, coalition military forces may be better suited to assume reconstruction programs in addition to combating the insurgency. Pushing reconstruction efforts

to NGOs has been generally counterproductive as much of the money is spent on administrative costs of sustaining the NGOs themselves rather than applying it to Afghanistan reconstruction projects. Additionally, NGOs represent special interest groups and divergent perspectives, motivations and plans of action, which may be contrary to optimal strategies and represent a waste of already insufficient resources.<sup>74</sup> The available remedies include forcing NGOs to be accountable to recognized multi-national organizations such as the United Nations, co-opting NGO efforts in a unified coalition Afghan strategy, or have coalition forces assume reconstruction efforts to ensure unity of effort.

U.S. efforts to ensure full cooperation from Pakistan have mixed results. A Washington Times report stated that “Mullah Mohammed Omar, the one-eyed leader of the Afghan Taliban, has fled a Pakistani city on the border with Afghanistan and found refuge from potential U.S. attacks in the teeming Pakistani port city of Karachi with the assistance of the Pakistani intelligence service.”<sup>75</sup> Such reliance on future ‘strategic assets’ by the Pakistan Army where organized drug crime has multiple linkages with the ISI makes it problematic for any counternarcotics strategy to be effective in Afghanistan if not addressed and neutralized. The announcement of the deployment of additional service members and a timetable for withdrawal beginning during 2011 has worried the Pakistani establishment of a “quick U.S. withdrawal that may destabilize the region further.”<sup>76</sup> Pakistani leadership analysis will lead to the conclusion that Pakistan must pay polite homage to U.S. demands. However, it must also hedge its bets to survive in a geostrategic environment consisting of a patient and unrelenting Taliban, organized drug crime elements and even Al-Qaeda because all have the fortitude for a long fight beyond the resources of an increasingly radical population. If the U.S. and coalition forces abandon

Afghanistan out of disgust for its ability to help itself, Pakistan will be helpless before the hordes of organized chaos.

The U.S. Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual provides, “a minimum of twenty counter-insurgents per 1,000 residents is often considered as minimum troop density required for effective COIN operations [...]”<sup>77</sup> Considering the Afghanistan population and the terrain, a conservative estimate requires at least 400,000 troops to ensure security and defeat the insurgency.<sup>78</sup> This does not include the capacity required for a counternarcotics force. With just 140,000 U.S. and coalition forces post surge, means the balance of force must come from the ANA and law enforcement agencies. “The [...] ANA to reach its planned goal of 134,000 (from the existing 95,000) by 2011.”<sup>79</sup> The strategy leaves open options for future expansion to 240,000 ANA and 160,000 Afghan National Police.”<sup>80</sup> This strategy makes better sense. In accordance with the COIN manual, the sum of Afghanistan federal forces between the ANA and AFP would be 400,000, or 70% sufficient in number to combat insurgency with a capacity to enforce narcotic laws. Building the ANA and AFP will take precious time for Afghan service members and law enforcement personnel to reach the professional maturity as organizations with competent leaders to make sound decisions to regulate a fractured nation.<sup>81</sup> Additional considerations must be afforded to protecting the institutions that enforce enacted judicial reforms. These protections must include security for facilities such as courts, law enforcement precincts and prisons. Further, criminal justice practitioners, their families and tribes may be subject to threats against their safety or targets of reprisals for interfering or eroding criminal activities such as drug smuggling, bribery and extortion.<sup>82</sup> Failures to afford adequate security for basic law and order functions will dissuade even the most qualified and committed Afghan criminal justice practitioners from assuming responsibilities impartially.<sup>83</sup> Pashtuns will have the



greatest representation as the majority of the Afghan population. In as much as this ethnicity is the preponderant majority of the Taliban, the Afghanistan government must be devoutly diligent to ensure ethnic favoritism is not tolerated among its governing institutions, and that they are not hijacked by radical Taliban ideology.

The last most controversial point of the counternarcotics strategy is the focus on building democracy in Afghanistan. This democratization agenda must be implemented cautiously in a form acceptable to traditional Islamic customs. Otherwise, tribal societies will continue to react with hostility and violence at any perception of changing significantly their way of life. The Shah of Iran's attempts to westernize his nation led to the Iranian revolution. Katzman reports that similar moves at radical social reforms and emancipation of women attempted by pro-Soviet Taraki and Amin led to a revolt by the Taliban.<sup>84</sup>

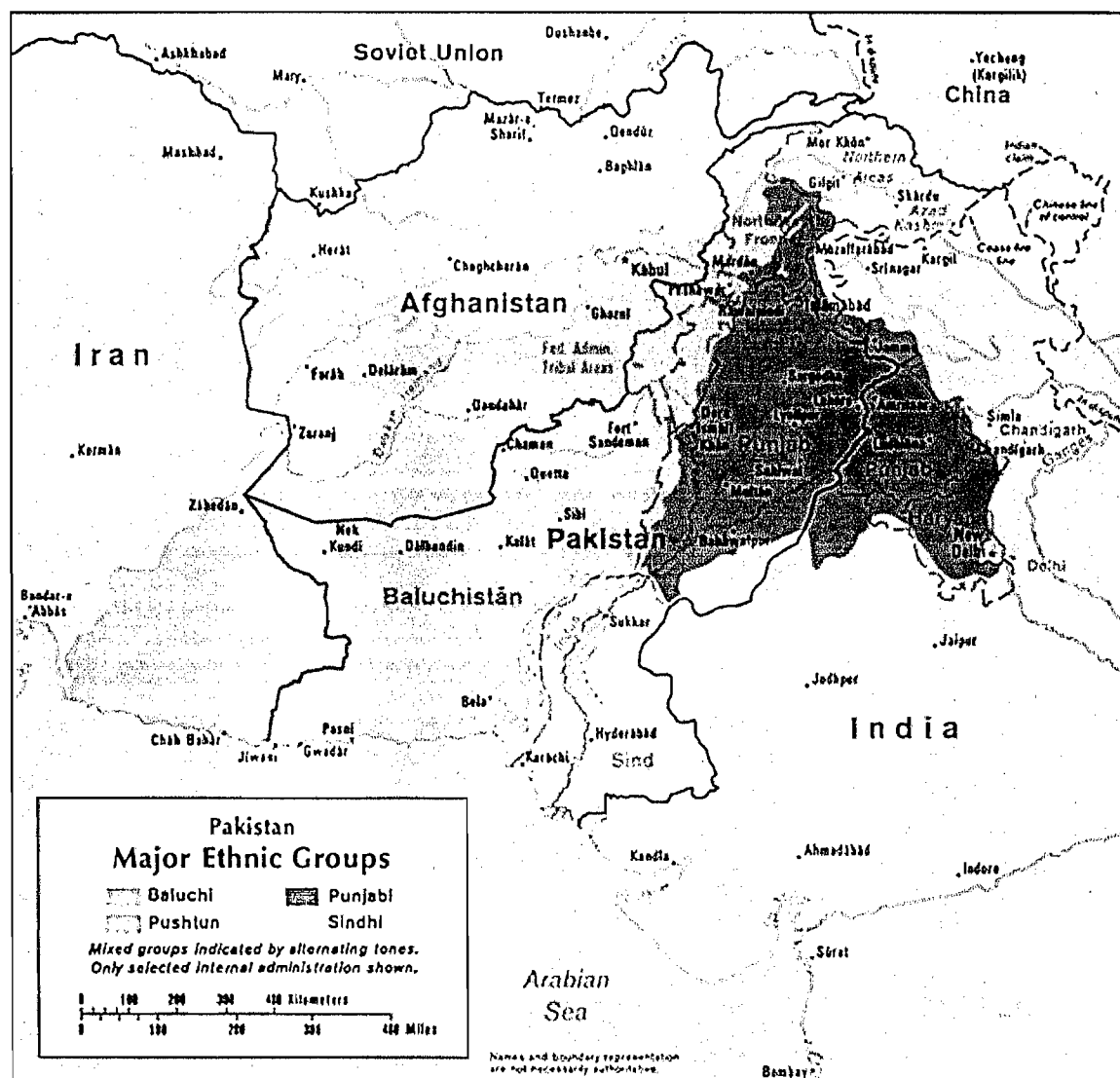
## **Conclusion**

The counternarcotics strategy is an intrinsically linked component of the coalition's counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan. The strategy must not undermine the effort and both require the element of human security to be satisfied for a meaningful peace. Defeating the insurgency is made more difficult because geostrategic concerns of Afghanistan's neighbors often run counter to the stated objectives of the counternarcotics strategy. Pakistan to a large extent is a key player in the counternarcotics strategy and the success of coalition-Afghanistan counterinsurgency efforts. Pakistan's connections and provisions of sanctuary for opium and heroin drug traffickers and the Taliban compromise the effectiveness of U.S. and coalition eradication and interdiction strategies. The previous U.S. and Afghanistan counternarcotics strategy focused on the five pillars namely; public information, judicial reform, alternative livelihood development, interdiction and eradication and had negligible success due to excessive

corruption in President Karzai's government, and inadequate consideration of the economic and social second and third order effects. The present focus of the Obama administration on providing alternative livelihood is the right way forward, which must be supported with real and substantial infrastructure development. Initial reluctance of U.S. and coalition forces to prosecute counternarcotics operations has been overcome and is a step in the right direction as long as the social and economic impacts are carefully considered with the Afghanistan government. Until such time as the levels of corruption in the Afghan government decrease significantly, its ability to fairly, deliver services such as developmental assistance improves, and its ability to govern equitably by representing the interests of all its citizens, U.S. and coalition forces must assume more reconstruction and nation building responsibilities. Poppy eradication programs should not be completely abandoned. Interdiction and prosecution of opium and heroin traffickers must be pursued aggressively while maintaining the security of local populations. Interdiction by Afghan law enforcement may require the support of military force to eliminate drug warlords and Taliban. The moral need for the U.S. to promote parliamentary democracy must be tempered with familiar cultural and theological customs of its many tribal societies. Finally, despite President Obama's plan for a phased withdrawal commencing in 2011, U.S. involvement in the counternarcotics fight will extend well into the foreseeable future whether it participates in the counterinsurgency fight or not.

Figure 1

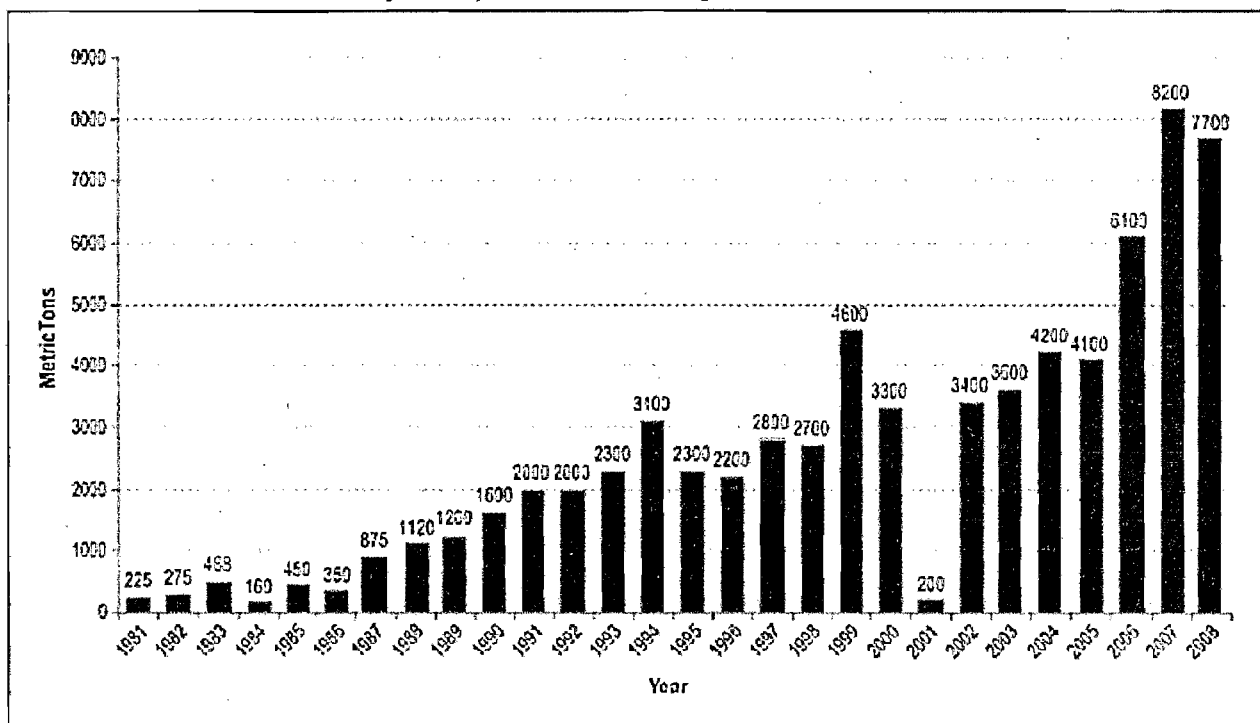
# Ethnic Affiliations Across the Af-Pak Border



504491 5-80 (545359)

Source: [http://www.reisenett.no/map\\_collection/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/Pakistan\\_Ethnic\\_80.jpg](http://www.reisenett.no/map_collection/middle_east_and_asia/Pakistan_Ethnic_80.jpg)

Figure 1. Opium Production in Afghanistan, 1981-2008



Source: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32686.pdf>, CRS-4.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State and U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Fighting the Opium Trade in Afghanistan: Myths, Facts, and Sound Policy*, March 11, 2008, [http://kabul.usembassy.gov/media/afghan\\_opium\\_myths\\_and\\_facts-final.pdf](http://kabul.usembassy.gov/media/afghan_opium_myths_and_facts-final.pdf), (accessed December 7, 2009), 5.
- <sup>3</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, (NY: Penguin, 2008), 6.
- <sup>4</sup> Pakistan was created from the partition of India on 14 August 1947 because it was believed that Muslims needed a separate nation from the Hindus in India. Pakistan believed that all Muslims from India would relocate to India upon independence.
- <sup>5</sup> Pakistan feared an advance by India westward would be rapid and overrun the breadth of its country.
- <sup>6</sup> Rashid, 35-109.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, 11.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 127.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid, 137, President Bush called for a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan in a speech at VMI on April 17, 2002, but Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld blocked the policy shift; stating U.S. forces would never be involved in nation building.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, 171-195.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 147.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 223.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, 329, During 2007, Afghanistan produced more than 92% of the world's heroin while Helmand province had a 162% increase in poppy cultivation during 2006 and by 2007 accounted for 50% of Afghanistan's poppy crop equaling the country's total from 2005.
- <sup>15</sup> CIA World Fact Book, "Afghanistan," 2009, <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>, (accessed December 7, 2009), 1.
- <sup>16</sup> See Rashid, "Ethnic Distribution Within Pakistan and Afghanistan", plate XVIII.
- <sup>17</sup> Rashid, 20.
- <sup>18</sup> Chris Johnson, *Afghanistan*, (NY: Oxfam, 2004), 49.
- <sup>19</sup> John K Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 107.
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- <sup>21</sup> Larry P Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless Wars: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban*, (Washington D.C., University of Washington Press, 2001), 102.
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- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, 12.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, 13-14.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, 14.
- <sup>26</sup> David Mansfield, *Water Management, Livestock and the Opium Economy, "Poppy Free" Provinces: A Measure or a Target*, (Kabul: AREU, 2009), 5.
- <sup>27</sup> Mansfield, 30-33.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 32.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 33.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, 30.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, 31.
- <sup>32</sup> Christopher M Blanchard, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, (Washington D.C.; CRS, 2009), 26.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3.
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- <sup>38</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2006 Volume 2: Statistics*, (Vienna: UN Press, 2006), 365-366.

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- <sup>45</sup> Blanchard, 38.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid, 44.
- <sup>47</sup> Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, *The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan*, (NY: Routledge, 2007), 40.
- <sup>48</sup> Barton, 153.
- <sup>49</sup> Blanchard, 15.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid, 19.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid, 1.
- <sup>52</sup> Blanchard suggested in his report summary that the Obama Administration and the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress should reconsider its counternarcotics strategy in light of the opium trade explosion despite foreign counternarcotics expenditures of \$2.9 billion from FY 2001 through FY 2009.
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- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, 8.
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- <sup>56</sup> Ibid 18.
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- <sup>58</sup> Kenneth Katzman (a), *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance*, (Washington D.C. Congressional Research Service, 2009), 6.
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- <sup>60</sup> The Economist, "The Perils of Keeping Everybody Happy", December 3, 2009, [http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=15017314](http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15017314) (accessed December 7, 2009).
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- <sup>62</sup> Katzman (b), 17.
- <sup>63</sup> Blanchard, 15.
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<sup>79</sup> Katzman (b), 29.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

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<sup>84</sup> Katzman (b), 2.

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